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A Note on the Speaker in Juvenal's *Satires*

Abstract: The paper sets the thesis that Juvenal, aware that aggressive satire in Lucilian style sounded false and void when unrelated to its times, tried to avoid this danger and to pump up some drama into his poems, so the figure of a Speaker blinded by anger was introduced to the *Satires*. The torrents of enraged words were used in order to cover the fact that the objects of contempt were of little importance to the listening public.

Key words: Latin literature, satire, Juvenal

Juvenal's texts are intense with emotions which continue to overwhelm even today's readers and drag them into his very deeply personal vision of the world, a vision conveyed by angry attacks on depicted subjects. This literary strategy is aimed at gaining reader's complete attention and eliciting a conviction that the text is intrinsically linked to the external world, thus becomes important to the reader. In the first *Satire* an unmerciful review of contemporary literary output is given (1.1–14): boring epic poems and their out-of-touch-with-the-reality mythological intrigues. In 1.17–30 and further a literary manifesto is proclaimed that introduces the notion that writing is an obligation, text should confront vicious world, and satire is the best weapon in the war against the omnipresent depravity. Therefore, in light of this manifesto, there is little difference between a satire and a rhetorical speech. In Juvenal's hands, the genre is molded into a persecutor's heated address to a court – it should serve as a means of persuasion. Yet random mention of Speaker's rhetorical education (1.15–17) provokes one to see the *Satires* as a continuation of school *progymnasmata*, specially so, when the 170–171 are pondered upon. Those satiric *suasoriae* limit meting out justice only to those who are already dead, distorting thus the fundamental quality of the republican rhetoric: participa-

tion in actual events. Without closeness to a real world the rhetoric slips into declamation. Juvenal blatantly breaks the rules of a) republican satire, b) republican rhetoric.

Juvenal's *Satires* are primordially deformed: they are intended as a remedy for a decline of literature (*difficile est saturam non scribere*, 1.30), a salubrious breeze of words that touch their listeners. Satiric poems should stigmatise evil-doers and persuade the audience that no improvement is possible. Speaker's focusing on the past likens the *Satires* to the pompous epic productions dismissed by the Speaker himself in the first lines of the programmatic poem and runs counter to the self-imposed objective of creating fresh themes in literature, themes that could be vital to his contemporary readers.

The yawning gap between the projected aim of the text and its unimportant content is, in my opinion, laboriously buried by means of a construction of the speaking self in the poems. I will try to define this construction after recalling the most seminal views on the subject of the Speaker in Juvenal's poems.

W.S. Anderson in his "Anger in Juvenal and Seneca"¹ adopts Kernan's thesis² of the public and private character of the speaker in satires. Accepting Kernan's theory of "the satirist", i.d. a constructed personality that presents the view on the world in satiric poems, a mask of an author that should not be identified with his/her private personality, Anderson believes that Juvenal, influenced by Seneca, created in his text a twofold "satirist". It is a raging warrior attacking insanely a corrupted world in the first three books of *Satires*, substituted with a more complacent personality in the last two books, one that reminds of a Democritean philosopher. The motto: *facit indignatio versus* (1.79) and its mad executor correspond to Seneca's *De ira*, while the Speaker of the 4th and the 5th book is close to the tenor of *De tranquillitate animi*.

M.M. Winkler³ accepts the mask theory, but pursuing the opinions of Sullivan and Feinberg⁴ he notes, that persistency of any author in depicting certain topics or situations may justify a perception that speaker's statements are similar to those of the author.

Susanna Morton Braund in her edition of the first book of Juvenal's *Satires*⁵ (largely after Anderson) accentuates the moral and political aspects of the use of *indignatio* in rhetorical contexts. On the one hand, such use of *indignatio* could alienate a speaker, because displaying strong emotions was deemed a sign of weak-

¹ W.S. Anderson: "Anger in Juvenal and Seneca". *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 1964, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 127–196.

² A. Kernan: *The Cankered Muse*. New Haven 1959.

³ M.M. Winkler: *The Persona in Three Satires of Juvenal*. Hildesheim–Zürich–New York 1983, pp. 1–17.

⁴ J.P. Sullivan: "Martial's Sexual Attitudes". *Philologus* 1979, Bd. 123, pp. 288–302; L. Feinberg: *The Satirist: His Temperament, Motivation, and Influence*. Ames, Iowa, 1963.

⁵ S. Morton Braund: *Juvenal, Satires, Book I*. Cambridge 1996.

ness by Roman listeners. On the other, *indignatio* could have been seen as opposed to *adulatio*, false flattery typical of Domitian's reign⁶. S. Morton Braund follows De Decker and Cairns⁷ in stressing the rhetorical structure of Juvenal's *Satires*. *Progymnasma*, *prosphonetikon*, *syntaktikon* are adduced as examples of rhetorical frames used to put ideas in. An analysis of the epic influences on Juvenal⁸ leads her to a statement that the first book of *Satires* forms a kind of epic poem with Lucilius as its hero.

I use all the interpretations and opinions reviewed above to corroborate the thesis that Juvenal was aware that aggressive satire in Lucilian style sounded false and void when unrelated to its times. The attacks on the figures of the past would make *Satires* fall prey to mockery. Trying to avoid this danger and to pump up some drama into his poems, Juvenal introduced the figure of a Speaker blinded by anger. The torrents of enraged words were used in order to cover the fact that the objects of contempt were of little importance to the listening public.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 17–18.

⁷ J. De Decker: *Juvenalis declamans: étude sur la rhétorique déclamatoire dans les satires de Juvenal*. Ghent 1913; F. Cairns: *Generic Compositions in Greek and Roman Poetry*. Edinburgh 1972.

⁸ S. Morton Braund: *Juvenal...*, pp. 21–24.